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S E C R E T SECTION 01 OF 02 IRAN RPO DUBAI 000004

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SUBJECT: MP SAYS IRANIAN REFORMERS SURPRISED AT SCALE OF
DISQUALIFICATIONS

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CLASSIFIED BY: Ramin Asgard, Acting Director, Iran Regional
Presence Office, DoS.
REASON: 1.4 (d)

1.(S//NF) Summary: A reformist Iranian Majles deputy (MP) told IRPO that reformers were surprised at the scale of recent initial disqualifications of parliamentary candidates by electoral supervisory commissions. The MP claimed that reformist candidates would not contest their disqualifications and would instead opt to boycott the elections. He predicted fewer than 30% overall voter participation. The MP himself learned recently that he had been disqualified despite having already served two terms in the Majles, and was visibly shaken by the news. He asserted that there was no longer any hope of free and fair elections, and although Supreme Leader Khamenei might intervene to allow a paltry few reformers to participate for the sake of appearances, none of the reformist candidates would go along with this transparent ploy. End summary.

REFORMERS FACE MASSIVE INITIAL DISQUALIFICATIONS

2.(S//NF) IRPOffs met January 22 with an Iranian reformist Majles deputy (MP) who had learned very recently that he had been disqualified from running for re-election in the upcoming Majles elections March 14, and was still visibly shaken by the news. Despite his two-term incumbency, the MP said he had been disqualified along with a majority of other reformist candidates. Reform groups expected some disqualifications of their candidates, as in previous elections, but the MP asserted they were nonetheless surprised by the wide scale.

3.(U) According to press reports, members of two of the largest reformist groups, the Islamic Iran Participation Front (IIPF) and the Mojahideen of the Islamic Revolution Organization (MIRO) were disqualified along with several reformist incumbents. Several members of the reformist National Trust Party were also reportedly disqualified.

WILL REFORMERS BOYCOTT THE ELECTIONS?

4.(S//NF) The MP claimed that reformist candidates would not protest their disqualifications and would now boycott the elections. He predicted that fewer than 30% of eligible voters would turn up at the polls. However, a spokesman for the reformist coalition told domestic news Jan 22 that the coalition is still considering whether to boycott the elections.

NO CHANCE NOW OF FREE AND FAIR ELECTIONS, MP SAYS

5.(S//NF) The MP asserted that there was no longer any hope of free and fair elections, claiming that the ruling conservatives were employing a five stage strategy to prevent reformers from re-taking the Majles:

--disqualifications

--disrupt reformist campaign events

--send out "night letters" on eve of vote, smearing reformers

--ballot stuffing and other voter fraud on election day

--no confidence votes

The MP asserted that Majles speaker Haddad-Adel had no chance of winning his constituency in Tehran, claiming if he won, it would be a sign that the elections had been completely rigged. The MP suggested that Supreme Leader Khamenei might intervene to allow a paltry few reformers to compete, for the sake of appearances. The MP claimed, however, that none of the reformist candidates would go along with this transparent ploy.

GUARDIAN COUNCIL STILL TO REVIEW CANDIDATES

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6.(U) These initial disqualifications were not done by the Guardian Council, which has yet to see the candidates' applications. The applications were first reviewed by electoral supervisory commissions. According to the head of the Interior Ministry elections headquarters, close to 40% of the approximately 7,200 candidates who registered were found to have criminal or legal records. He did not elaborate further about the kinds of records which resulted in initial disqualification by the electoral commissions. Disqualified candidates will have more than one opportunity to protest their disqualifications. Candidates can issue their protests between January 23-26; the electoral commissions will then consider the protests between January 27-February 3. Rejected candidates can protest again between February 3-22, at which point the Guardian Council will review the appeals. Candidates can appeal disqualifications by the Guardian Council between February 23-26. Final results will be announced March 5.

17. Comment: Heavy-handed disqualifications of reformist candidates in these elections have long been expected, and are likely to continue throughout the remainder of the vetting process. A reformist boycott of the elections could be significant if it results in low voter turnout on election day. High voter turnout is viewed by many as an indication of systemic legitimacy, and the government has always strongly encouraged voter participation. If there is low voter turnout due to a boycott, international criticism about the freedom and fairness of elections in the Islamic Republic might resonate more strongly with the Iranian public.

ASGARD